

The FORESTERS DAUGHTER



A ROMANCE OF THE BEAR TOOTH RANGE

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

This little story is the outcome of two trips (neither of which was in the Bear Tooth forest) during the years 1909 and 1910. The golden trail is an actuality for me. The camp on the lake was mine. The rain, the snow I met, the prying camp robbers, the grouse, the muskrats, the beaver, were my companions. But Beres McFarlane was with me only in imagination. She is a fiction, born of a momentary powerful handclasp of a western rancher's daughter. The story of Wayland Norcross is fiction also. But the McFarlane ranch, the mill and the lonely ranger stations are closely drawn pictures of realties. Although the stage of my comedy is Colorado, I have not held to any one locality. The scene is composite.

It was my intention originally to write a much longer and more important book concerning Supervisor McFarlane, but this is merely the very slender story of a young western girl who, being desired of three strong men, bestows her love on a tourist whose weakness is at once her allurements and her cure. The admittance problem, the sociologic theme, which was to have made the novel worth while, got lost in some way on the low trail and never caught up with the lovers. I'm sorry, but so it was.

CHAPTER I.

The Happy Girl.

THE stage line which ran from Williams to Bear Tooth (one of the most authentic then to be found in all the west) possessed at least one genuine Concord coach, so faded, so saddened, so cracked and so splintered that its passengers entered it under protest and alighted from it with thanksgiving, and yet it must have been built by honorable men, for in 19— it still made the run of 120 miles twice each week without loss of wheel or even so much as molting a scrap of paint.

And yet whatever it may have been in its youth it was in its age no longer a gay dash of color in the landscape. On the contrary, it fitted into the dust brown and sage green plain as defensively as a beetle in a dusty path. Nevertheless it was an indispensable part of a very moving picture as it crept, creaking and groaning (or it may be it was the suffering passenger creaking and groaning, along the hillside).

After leaving the Grande river the road winds up a pretty high divide before plunging down into Ute park, as they call all that region lying between the Continental range on the east and the Bear Tooth plateau on the west. It was a big spread of land and very far from an eastern man's conception of a park. From Dome peak it seems a plain; but, in fact, when clouds shut off the high summits to the west this "valley" becomes a veritable mountain land, a tumbled, lonely country, over which an occasional horseman crawls, a minute but persistent insect. It is, to be exact, a succession of ridges and ravines, sculptured in some far off, post glacial times by floods of water, covered now, rather sparsely, with pinons, cedars and aspens, a dry, forbidding but majestic landscape.

In late August the hills become iridescent, opaline with the translucent yellow of the aspen, the coral and crimson of the fire weed, the blood red of huckleberry beds and the royal purple of the asters, while flowing round all, as solvent and neutral setting, lies the gray-green of the ever present and ever enduring sage brush.

Through this gorgeous land of mist, of stillness and of death a few years ago a pale young man (seated beside the driver) rode one summer day in a voiceless rapture which made Bill McCoy weary.

"If you'd had as much of this as I have you'd talk of something else," he growled after a half dozen attempts at conversation. Bill wasn't much to look at, but he was a good driver, and the stranger respected him for it.

Eventually this simple minded horseman became curious about the slim young fellow sitting beside him.

"What you doing out here anyhow— fishing or just rebuilding a lung?" "Rebuilding two lungs," answered the tourist.

"Well, this climate will just about put lungs into a coffee can," retorted Bill, with official loyalty to his country.

To his discerning eye "the tourist" now became "a lunger." "Where do you live when you're home?" "Connecticut."

"I knew it!" "How did you know it?" The youth seemed really interested to know. "I drove another fellow up here last fall that dealt out the same kind of brogue you do."

Bill was prevented at the moment from pursuing this line of inquiry by the discovery of a couple of horsemen racing from a distant ranch toward the road. It was plain, even to the stranger, that they intended to intercept the stage, and Bill piled the lash with sudden vigor.

"I'll give 'em a chase," said he grimly.

The other appeared a little alarmed. "What are they, bandits?"

"Bandits?" sneered Bill. "Your eyesight is piercing. Them's girls."

The traveler apologized. "My eyes aren't very good," he said hurriedly. He was, however, quite justified in his mistake, for both riders wore wide rimmed sombreros and rode astride at a furious pace, bandanas fluttering, skirts streaming, and one was calling in shrill command, "Oh, Bill!"

As they neared the gate the driver drew up with a word of surprise. "Why, howdy, girls? Howdy?" he said, with an assumption of innocence. "Were you wishin' fer to speak to me?"

"Oh, shut up!" commanded one of the girls, a round faced, freckled rump. "You know perfectly well that Berrie is going home today. We told you all about it yesterday."

"Sure thing!" exclaimed Bill. "I'd forgot all about it."

"Like nothin'!" exclaimed the maid. "You've been countin' the hours till you got here. I know you."

Meanwhile her companion had slipped from her horse. "Well, goodby, Molly. Whah I could stay longer."

"Goodby. Run down agin."

"I will. You come up."

The young passenger sprang to the ground and politely said: "May I help you in?"

Bill stared, the girl smiled, and her companion called: "Be careful, Berrie, don't hurt yourself, the wagon might pitch."

The youth, perceiving that he had made another mistake, stammered an apology.

The girl perceived his embarrassment and sweetly accepted his hand. "I am much obliged, all the same."

Bill shook with malicious laughter. "Out in the country girls are warranted to jump clean over a neatly tilted lute like this," he explained.

The girl took a seat in the back corner of the dusty vehicle, and Bill opened conversation with her by asking what kind of a time she had been having "in the east."

"Fine," said she. "Did you get as far back as my old town?"

"What town is that, Bill?" "Oh, come off! You know I'm from Omaha."

"No; I only got as far as South Bend."

The picture which the girl had made as she dashed up to the pasture gate— her hat rim blown away from her brown face and sparkling eyes— united with the kindness in her voice as she accepted his gallant aid, entered a deep impression on the tourist's mind, but he did not turn his head to look at her— perhaps he feared Bill's elbow quite as much as his guffaw— but he listened closely, and by listening learned that she had been "east" for several weeks, and also that she was known, and favorably known, all along the line, for whenever they met a team or passed a ranch some one called out, "Hello, Berrie!" in cordial salute, and the men, old and young, were especially pleased to see her.

Meanwhile the stage rose and fell over the gigantic swells like a tiny boat on a monster sea, while the sun blazed ever more fervently from the splendid sky, and the hills glowed with ever increasing tumult of color. Through this land of color, of repose, of romance, the young traveler rode, drinking deep of the germless air, feeling that the girl behind him was a wondrous part of this wild and unaccountable country.

He had no chance to study her face again till the coach rolled down the hill to "Yancy's," a ranch house, where they were to take dinner and change horses.

With intent to show Bill that he did

not greatly fear his smiles the youth sprang down and offered a hand to assist his charming fellow passenger to alight, and she, with kindly understanding, again accepted his aid, to Bill's chagrin, and they walked up the path side by side.

"This is all very new and wonderful to me," the young man said in explanation, "but I suppose it's quite commonplace to you—and Bill!"

"Oh, no—it's home!" "You were born here?" "No, I was born in the east, but I've lived here ever since I was three years old."

"By east you mean Kansas?" "No, Missouri," she laughed back at him.

She was taller than most women and gave out an air of fine unconscious health which made her good to see, although her face was too broad to be pretty. She smiled easily, and her teeth were white and even. Her hand he noticed was as strong as steel and brown as leather. Her neck rose from her shoulders like that of an acrobat, and she walked with the sense of security which comes from self reliant strength.

She was met at the door by old lady Yancy, who pumped her hand up and down, exclaiming: "My stars! I'm glad to see ye back! Pears like the country is just naturally good to the dogs without you. The dance last Saturday was a frost, so I hear—no snap to the fiddlin', no gum to the jiggin'. It shorely was pitiful."

Yancy himself, tall, grizzled, succinct, shook her hand to his turn. "Ma's right, girl, the country needs ye. I'm scared every time ye go away fer four some feller will snap ye up."

The young tourist—he signed W. W. Norcross in Yancy's register—watched her closely and listened to every word

As they crossed the little pole bridge which spanned the flood the tourist exclaimed: "What exquisite water! It's like melted opals."

"Comes right down from the snow," she answered, impressed by the poetry of his simile.

He would gladly have lingered, listening to the song of the water, but as she passed on he followed. The opposite hill was sharp and the road stony, but as they reached the top the young easterner called out, "See the savins!"

Before them stood a grove of cedars, old, gray and drear, as weirdly impressive as the cacti in a Mexican desert. Torn by winds, scarred by lightnings, deeply rooted, tenacious as tradition, unlovely as Egyptian mummies, fantastic, dwarfed and blackened, these unaccountable creatures clung to the ledges. "What do you suppose planted those trees there?"

The girl was deeply impressed by the novelty of this query. "I never thought to ask. I reckon they just grew."

"No, there's a reason for all these plantings," he insisted.

"We don't worry ourselves much about such things out here," she replied, with charming humor. "We don't even worry about the weather. We just take things as they come."

They walked on talking with new intimacy. "Where is your home?" he asked.

"A few miles out of Bear Tooth. You are from the east, Bill says—the far east," we call it."

"From New Haven. I've just finished at Yale. Have you ever been in a city?"

"Oh, yes! I go to Denver once in awhile, and I saw St. Louis once, but I was only a yearling and don't remember much about it. What are you doing out here, if it's a fair question?"

He looked away at the mountains. "I got rather used up last spring, and my doctor said I'd better come out here for awhile and build up. I'm going up to Meeker's mill. Do you know where that is?"

"I know every stovetop in this park," she answered. "Joe Meeker is kind of related to me—uncle by marriage. He lives about fifteen miles over the hill from Bear Tooth."

This fact seemed to bring them still closer together. "I'm glad of that," he said pointedly. "Perhaps I shall be permitted to see you now and again? I'm going to be lonesome for awhile, I'm afraid."

"Don't you believe it! Joe Meeker's boys will keep you interested," she assured him.

The stage overtook them at this point and Bill snarled remarked, "If you'd been alone, young feller, I'd 'a' give you a chase." His resentment of the outsider's growing favor with the girl was ludicrously evident.

As they rose into the higher levels the aspen shook its yellowish leaves in the breeze and the purple foothills gained in majesty. Great new peaks came into view on the right, and the lofty cliffs of the Bear Tooth range loomed in naked grandeur high above the blue green of the pines which clothed their sloping eastern sides.

At intervals the road passed small log ranches crouching low on the banks of creeks, but aside from these—and the sparse animal life around them—no sign of settlement could be seen. The valley lay as it had lain for thousands of years, repeating its forests as the meadows of the lower levels send forth their annual grasses. Norcross said to himself, "I have circled the track of progress and have re-entered the border America, where the stagecoach is still the one stirring thing beneath the sun."

At last the driver, with a note of exultation, called out, "Grab a root, everybody! It's all the way down hill and time to feed!"

And so as the dusk came over the mighty spread of the hills to the east and the peaks to the west darkened from violet to purple black the stage creaked and rattled and rushed down the winding road through thickening signs of civilization and just at nightfall rolled into the little town of Bear Tooth, which is the eastern gateway of the Ute plateau.

Norcross had given a great deal of thought to the young girl behind him, and thought had deepened her charm. Her frankness, her humor, her superb physical strength and her calm self reliance appealed to him, and the more dangerously because he was so well aware of his own weakness and loneliness, and as the stage drew up before the hotel he fervently said, "I hope I shall see you again?"

Norcross understood. She didn't re-

lish the notion of being so close to the frankly amorous driver, who neglected no opportunity to be personal. Therefore he helped her to her seat inside and resumed his place in front.

Bill, now broadly communicative, minutely detailed his tastes in food, horses, liquors and saddlers in a monologue which would have been tiresome to any one but an imaginative young eastern student. Bill had a vast knowledge of the west, but a distressing habit of repetition.

In this informing way some ten miles were traversed, the road climbing ever higher and the mountains to right and left increasing in grandeur each hour, till of a sudden and in a deep valley on the bank of another swift stream they came upon a squalid saloon and a minute postoffice. This was the town of Moscow.

Bill, lumbering down over the wheel, took a bag of mail from the boot and dragged it into the cabin. The girl rose, stretched herself and said: "This stagin' is slow business. I'm cramped. I'm going to walk on ahead."

"May I go with you?" asked Norcross.

"Sure thing! Come along."

As they crossed the little pole bridge which spanned the flood the tourist exclaimed: "What exquisite water! It's like melted opals."

"Comes right down from the snow," she answered, impressed by the poetry of his simile.

CHAPTER II.

"This is our ranch."

BEFORE Beres could reply a man's voice called, "Hello, there!" and a tall fellow stepped up to her with confident mien.

Norcross awkwardly shrank away. This was her cowboy lover, of course. It was impossible that so attractive a girl should be unattached, and the knowledge produced in him a faint but very definite pang of envy and regret.

The happy girl, even in the excitement of meeting her lover, did not forget the stranger. She gave him her hand in parting, and again he thrilled to its amazing power. It was small, but it was like a steel clamp. "Stop in on your way to Meeker's," she said, as a kindly man would have done. "You pass our gate. My father is Joseph McFarlane, the forest supervisor. Good night."

"Good night," he returned with sincere liking.

The hotel was hardly larger than the log shanty of a railway grading camp, but the meat was edible, and just outside the door roared Bear creek, which came down directly from Dome mountain, and the young easterner went to sleep beneath its singing that night. He should have dreamed of the happy mountain girl, but he did not. On the contrary, he imagined himself back at college in the midst of innumerable freshmen yelling: "Bill McCoy! Bill McCoy!"

He woke a little bewildered by his strange surroundings, and when he became aware of the cheap bed, the flimsy washstand, the ugly wall paper and thought how far he was from home and friends he not only sighed, he shivered. The room was chill, the pitcher of water cold almost to the freezing point, and his joints were stiff and painful from his ride. What folly to come so far into the wilderness at this time!

As the eastern youth crawled from his bed and looked from the window he was still further disheartened. In the foreground stood a half dozen frame buildings, graceless and cheap, without tree or shrub to give shadow or charm of line—all was bare, bleak, and stern. But under his window the stream was singing its glorious mountain song, and away to the west rose the aspiring peaks from which it came. Romance brooded in that shadow, and on the lower foothills the frost touched foliage glowed like a mosaic of jewels.

Dressing hurriedly he went down to the small barroom, whose litter of duffle bags, guns, saddles and camp utensils gave evidence of the presence of many hunters and fishermen. The slovenly landlord was poring over a newspaper, while a discouraged half grown youth was slugging the floor with a mop. But a cheerful clamor from an open door at the back of the hall told that breakfast was on.

Venturing over the threshold, Norcross found himself seated at table with some five or six men in corduroy jackets and laced boots, who were, in fact, merchants and professional men from Denver and Pueblo out for fish and such game as the law allowed, and all in holiday mood. They joked the waiter girls and joshed one another in noisy good fellowship, ignoring the slim youth in English riding suit, who came in with an air of mingled melancholy and timidity and took a seat at the lower corner of the long table.

As he looked about the room the tourist's eye was attracted by four young fellows seated at a small table to his right. They wore rough shirts of an olive-green shade and their faces were wind scorched, but their voices held a pleasant tone, and something in the manner of the landlady toward them made them noticeable. Norcross later asked her who they were.

"They're forestry boys."

"Forestry boys?"

"Yes. The supervisor's office is here, and these boys are his help."

This information added to Norcross's interest and cheered him a little. He knew something of the United States forest service and had been told that many of the rangers were college men. He resolved to make their acquaintance. "If I'm to stay here they will help me endure the exile," he said.

After breakfast he went forth to find the postoffice, expecting a letter of instructions from Meeker. He found nothing of the sort, and this quite disconcerted him.

"The stage is gone," the postmistress told him, "and you can't get up till day after tomorrow. You might reach Meeker by using the government phone, however."

"Where will I find the government phone?"

"Down in the supervisor's office. They're very accommodating. They'll let you use it if you tell them who you want to reach."

It was impossible to miss the forestry building for the reason that a handsome flag fluttered above it. The door being open, Norcross perceived from the threshold a young clerk at work on a typewriter, while in a corner close by the window another and older man was working intently on a map.

"Is this the office of the forest supervisor?" asked the youth.

The man at the machine looked up and pleasantly answered: "It is, but the supervisor is not in yet. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"It may be you can. I am on my way to Meeker's mill for a little outing. Perhaps you could tell me where Meeker's mill is and how I can best get there."

The man at the map meditated. "It's not far, some eighteen or twenty miles, but it's over a pretty rough trail."

"What kind of a place is it?" "Very charming. You'll like it. Real mountain country."

This officer was a plain featured man of about thirty-five, with keen and clear eyes. His voice, though strongly nasal, possessed a note of manly sincerity. As he studied his visitor he smiled.

"You look brand new. Haven't had time to season check, have you?" "No. I'm a stranger in a strange land."

"Out for your health?" "Yes. My name is Norcross. I'm just getting over a severe illness, and I'm up here to lay around and fish and recuperate—if I can."

"You can—you will. You can't help it," the other assured him. "Join one of our surveying crews for a week and I'll mellow that suit of yours and make a real mountaineer of you. I see you wear a Sigma Chi pin. What was your school?"

"I am a 'Son of Eli'! Last year's class."

The other man displayed his fob. "I'm ten classes ahead of you. My name is Nash. I'm what they call an 'expert'. I'm up here doing some estimating and surveying for a big ditch they're putting in. I was rather in hopes you had come to join our ranks. We sons of Eli are holding the conservation fort these days, and we need help."

"My knowledge of your work is rather vague," admitted Norcross. "My father is in the lumber business, but his point of view isn't exactly yours."

"He says 'em, does he?" "He did. He helped devastate Michigan."

"After me the deluge! I know the kind. Why not make yourself a sort of vicarious atonement?"

Norcross smiled. "I had not thought of that. It would help some, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would. There's no great money in the work, but it's about the most enlightened of all the governmental bureaus."

Norcross was strongly drawn to this forester, whose tone was that of a highly trained specialist. "I rode up on the stage yesterday with Miss Berrie McFarlane."

"The supervisor's daughter?" "She seemed a fine western type."

"She's not a type; she's an individual. She hasn't her like anywhere I've gone. She cuts a wide swath up here. Being an only child, she's both son and daughter to McFarlane. She knows more about forestry than her father. In fact, half the time he depends on her judgment."

Norcross was interested, but did not want to take up valuable time. He said, "Will you let me use your telephone to Meeker's?"

"Very sorry, but our line is out of order. You'll have to wait a day or so, or use the mails. You're too late for today's stage, but it's only a short ride across."

As they were talking a girl came galloping up to the hitching post and slid from her horse. It was Beres McFarlane. "Good morning, Emery," she called to the surveyor. "Good morning," she nodded at Norcross. "How do you find yourself this morning?"

"Homiesick," he replied smilingly.

"Why so?" "I'm disappointed in the town."

Berrie looked round at the forlorn shops, the irregular sidewalks, the

know about anything here till other people have forgotten it."

Norcross followed her into the office, curious to know more about her. She was so changed from his previous conception of her that he was puzzled. She had the directness and the brevity of phrase of a business man as she opened letters and discussed their contents with the men.

"Truly she is different," thought Norcross, and yet she lost something by reason of the display of her proficiency as a clerk. "I wish she would leave business to some one else," he inwardly grumbled as he rose to go.

She looked up from her desk. "Come in again later. We may be able to reach the mill."

He thanked her and went back to his hotel, where he overhauled his outfit and wrote some letters. His disgust of the town was lessened by the presence of that handsome girl, and the hope that he might see her at luncheon made him impatient of the clock.

She did not appear in the dining room, and when Norcross inquired of Nash whether she took her meals at the hotel or not the expert replied: "No; she goes home. The ranch is only a few miles down the valley. Occasionally we invite her, but she don't think much of the cooking."

One of the young surveyors put in a word: "I shouldn't think she would, I'd ride ten miles any time to eat one of Mrs. McFarlane's dinners."

"Yes," agreed Nash, with a reflective look in his eyes. "She's a mighty fine girl, and I join the boys in wishing her better luck than marrying Cliff Belden."

"Is it settled that way?" asked Norcross.

"Yes. The supervisor warned us all, but even he never has any good words for Belden. He's a surly cuss and violently opposed to the service. His brother is one of the proprietors of the Meeker mill, and they have all tried to bulldoze Landon, our ranger over there. By the way, you'll like Landon. He's a Harvard man and a good ranger. His shack is only a half-mile from Meeker's house. It's a pretty well known fact that Alec Belden is part proprietor of a saloon over there that worries the supervisor worse than anything. Cliff swears he's not connected with it, but he's more or less sympathetic with the crowd."

Norcross, already deeply interested in the present and future of a girl whom he had met for the first time only the day before, was quite ready to give up his trip to Meeker.

Early on the second morning he went to the postoffice—which was also the telephone station—to get a letter or message from Meeker. He found neither. But as he was standing in the door undecided about taking the stage Beres came into town riding a fine bay pony and leading a blaze faced buckskin behind her.

Her face shone cordially as she called out, "Well, how do you stack up this morning?"

"Tiptop," he answered, in an attempt to match her cheery greeting.

"Do you like our town better?" "Not a bit! But the hills are magnificent."

"Anybody turned up from the mill?" "No. I haven't heard a word from there. The telephone is still out of commission."

"They can't locate the break. Uncle Joe sent word by the stage driver asking us to keep an eye out for you and send you over. I've come to take you over myself."

"That's mighty good of you, but it's a good deal to ask."

"I want to see Uncle Joe on business, anyhow, and you'll like the ride better than the journey by stage."

Leaving the horses standing with their bridle reins hanging on the ground, she led the way to the office.

"When father comes in tell him where I've gone and send Mr. Norcross' packs by the first wagon."

"You'd better take my bay," said Beres. "Old Paintface there is little notional!"

Norcross approached his mount with a caution which indicated that he had at least been instructed in range horse psychology, and as he gathered his reins together to mount, Berrie remarked:

"I hope you're saddle wise."

"I had a few lessons in a riding school," he replied modestly.

Young Downing approached the girl with a low voiced protest. "You oughtn't to ride old Paint. He nearly pitched the supervisor the other day."

"I'm not worried," she said and swung to her saddle.

The ugly beast made off in a tearing sidewise rush, but she smilingly called back, "All set." And Norcross followed her in high admiration.

Eventually she brought her broncho to subjection, and they trotted off together along the wagon road quite comfortably. By this time the youth had forgotten his depression, his homesickness of the morning. The valley was again enchanted ground.

After shaking along between some rather sorry fields of grain for a mile or two Beres swung into a side trail. "I want you to meet my mother," she said.

The grassy road led to a long, one story, half log, half slab house which stood on the bank of a small, swift, willow bordered stream.

(Continued next Saturday.)



The Girl Behind Him Was a Wondrous Part of This Wild and Unaccountable Country.

she spoke with an intensity of interest which led Mrs. Yancy to say privately: "Pears like that young 'lunger' ain't got to forget ye if he can help it."

"What makes you think he's a 'lunger'?" "Don't haf to think. One look at him is enough."

Thereafter a softer light—the light of pity—shone in the eyes of the girl. "Poor fellow! He does look kind o' peaked. But this climate will bring him up to the scratch," she added, with optimistic faith in her beloved hills.

A moment later the downcoming stage pulled in loaded to the side lines, and everybody on it seemed to know Beres McFarlane. It was hello here and hello there and how are ye between, with smacks from the women and open cries of "Pass it around" on the part of the men, till Norcross marvelled at the display.

"She seems a great favorite," he observed to Yancy.

"Who—Berrie? She's the whole works up at Bear Tooth. Good thing she don't want to go to congress—she'd lay Jim Worthing on the shelf."

Beres's popularity was not so remarkable as her manner of receiving it. She took it all as a sort of joke—a good, kindly joke. She shook hands with her male admirers and smacked the cheeks of her female friends with an air of modest deprecation. "Oh, you don't mean it," was one of her phrases. She enjoyed